

# **The CEO's Disaster Survival Kit**

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A Common-sense Guide for Chief Executive Officers

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## Executive Summary

The notion of a CEO Disaster Survival Kit may at first sound humorous, but the contents of this kit have a very serious purpose. That purpose is to help CEOs minimize their risk that the next disaster striking their community exposes them to: legally, professionally, financially, and personally.

The kit's contents are not conventional survival tools like matches, fish hooks, and signaling mirrors. Instead, they are specialized tools. The tools include: a CEO disaster checklist; a guide to help conduct your own risk self-assessment; a set of resources, and a guide to equipping your own custom survival kit. The kit is designed as a descriptive model so that you can build your own personalized "CEO Disaster Survival Kit" that helps you ask the right questions and make the right calls as you react during the first critical sixty minutes after the next disaster strikes.

This document was adapted from the *CEO Disaster Survival Kit* that was developed for local government CEOs by local government CEOs. These CEOs learned firsthand about the financial, legal, and other risks CEOs run, for each commanded their community's response to a major disaster. From this common experience base these officials developed this kit to help others, including private sector CEOs, meet the challenge of responding effectively to their disaster management responsibilities.

The CEO Disaster Checklist Kit has four major purposes:

- To assist CEOs as they react to the first report of a major emergency
- To encourage the development of companion checklists and other management tools for other key actors in the local emergency system
- To provide a form and format that, with adaptation to meet unique organization needs, company officials can follow as a "template" when reporting disasters or potential emergencies to the CEO in the event of a major emergency
- To encourage CEOs to know their roles and responsibilities *before* the next disaster strikes.

We ask you to scan the rest of this kit. Size it up. Will the tools in this kit help you reduce your risk? If you think they might, pass this kit along to your staff for action. You will be taking a sound step toward the goal of protecting your organization from future disasters.

## **DISCLAIMER**

This project has been financed in part with Federal funds from the Federal Emergency Management Agency under award number EMW-BA-K-1429-A003. The contents do not necessarily reflect the views and policies of the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

The contents of this kit reflect recommendations that members of the Integrated Emergency Management System (IEMS) National Advisory Committee developed in workgroup sessions and do not necessarily reflect views or policies of the International Association of Fire Chiefs.

The mention of trade names or commercial products does not constitute an endorsement or recommendation for use, by either the Federal Emergency Management Agency or the International Association of Fire Chiefs.

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## Section 1

# Introduction

A disaster is a stern test of an organization's leadership. As a Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of your company, you will bear direct and ultimate responsibility for how well your organization survives the next time disaster threatens.

But no matter how fundamental the responsibility, it is nonetheless difficult for any CEO to turn from the urgent pressure of each day's business to face the prospect of some future disaster. This takes wisdom and judgment to see the need to manage the risk now. It also takes leadership to keep the commitment to prepare for these distant responsibilities. This *CEO Disaster Survival Kit* has tools to assist you to meet the responsibilities, analyze you and your community's risks, and take action to reduce them to an acceptable level.

### **Why There is Need for a CEO Survival Kit**

Why do you as a CEO need a *Disaster Survival Kit*? First, the likelihood of disaster occurring in your community is growing. Later in this section survey data of the nation's disaster experience will give you further evidence on this point. Second, the same public that places little priority on emergency management before a disaster expects and demands effective leadership during a disaster. Third, effective disaster management places extraordinary demands on local government CEOs during disaster. This is particularly true in the first hours of an emergency. Decisions made early in a disaster by public officials usually have far reaching consequences. Yet it is during this time that CEOs have the fewest resources available to assist the decision-making.

Together these factors place CEOs at risk: professionally, legally, and financially. During any major emergency or disaster the CEO has ultimate responsibility for the well being of the company and ultimate responsibility for the actions of subordinates. Obviously, such extensive responsibility, and the potent liability issues involved are of paramount importance to a CEO.

## **Purpose of Kit**

This disaster survival kit serves four key purposes:

- To assist CEOs as they react to the first report of a major emergency
- To encourage the development of companion checklists and other management tools for other key actors in the organization's emergency system
- To provide a form and format that, with adaptation to meet company needs, officials can follow as a "template" when reporting disasters or potential emergencies to the CEO in the event of a major emergency
- To encourage CEOs to know their roles and responsibilities *before* the next disaster strikes.

The kit recognizes that to a certain extent some of this risk is unavoidable; it comes with the territory. But these risks can be, indeed must be, managed. Disasters test how well CEOs have prepared themselves and their communities for surviving known, but unpredictable, threats. In light of these realities, this *CEO Disaster Survival Kit* is offered as a tool kit you can use to reduce your risks while meeting the obligations of your office.

## **Description of the Contents of the *CEO Disaster Survival Kit***

This kit consists of the following tools:

- In Section II there is a self-assessment questionnaire
- In Section III there is a list of the items that you should consider for your kit, a description of the CEO Checklist, and a sample memo you can refer to when you direct your subordinates to construct your local version of the CEO survival kit.
- In Section IV there are references to assist you further, including: an explanation of the role of the CEO in Business Continuity Plan development, a camera-ready copy of the CEO Checklist, 37 action steps to take to reduce risk; and further references.

While the CEO Checklist is designed to be part of the larger kit that contains additional information, the actual Checklist is wallet-sized. This means CEOs can conveniently keep it with them anytime and anywhere. A sample of the Checklist is in this kit for your use. The checklist is organized into six panels: Background Information, Immediate Actions, Personal Actions, Legal, and Public Information.

The CEO Survival Kit is compatible with the National Incident Management System.

### **Assumptions about CEO Involvement in Emergency Management**

The kit is based on a number of assumptions about the general nature of involvement by CEOs in emergency management programs. These assumptions are:

- Community policies and systems that affect community emergency risks and potential for response are not well understood by the chief executive officer
- CEOs know little of what is involved in Comprehensive Emergency Management or in an integrated Emergency Management System.
- CEO has little experience in managing emergencies
- The role of the CEO should be to provide leadership in the development of public policy and to establish an effective IEMS.
- CEOs, for the most part, do not understand the legal requirements and constraints placed on public officials at the Federal, state, and local levels by enabling legislation and the legal governing framework
- CEOs have little familiarity with emergency plan development.
- CEOs may not have a clear perception of the role of the Emergency Program Manager (Civil Defense Director or similar title).
- Communication between the CEO and the emergency program managers may leave something to be desired.



If on the whole these assumptions apply to your situation then you have reason to be concerned that you are at risk. The next section describes why the evidence indicates that that risk may be growing.

## **The Growing Risk**

Experts predict that for the foreseeable future disasters will occur more frequently, will be more destructive, and will require more and better coordination of response resources.

*[First ..... “disasters in American society are increasing and will continue to mount for several reasons.....new disaster agents, such as chronic and sudden chemical hazards , are emerging as a result of technological developments. Second, greater numbers of people are at risk, both because of migration and settlement trends and because of lifestyle changes. The greater social and economic interdependence which characterizes our modern way of life means that the potential now exists for more massive disasters, with regional and even nationwide impact.”*

*“Technological hazards pose different, and often more difficult, management problems than do natural hazards. Contributing factors to this greater ???? are the ???? and newness of technological hazards: the ???? of accumulated experience with control or coping measures; the less understood hazard chains; the broader opportunities for control intervention; the perceived amenability of technological hazards to fixes; and the simultaneous need to enlarge benefits and reduce risks in judging the tolerance of technological hazards and instituting control strategies.”*

*“Floods and hurricanes, the two most numerous and costly natural disasters in the United States, can be expected to cause even more damage due to population growth and development in high-hazard areas.”*

Natural disasters, while not necessarily happening more frequently tomorrow than today, are far more likely to threaten catastrophic loss of life and property. For one thing, more people are living and working in dangerous areas. The seaside development, the mobile home park in the

flood plain, and the subdivision on the hillside are some examples of the increasing number of high-risk developments vulnerable to natural hazards.

Anti-social behavior also presents new problems. Experts predict a growing threat from domestic terrorism. Product tampering that began with the “Tylenol murders” suggests just one path that domestic terrorism can take. In our increasingly interdependent society, we grow more vulnerable to threats and the consequences of such actions. Communities ill prepared to deal with the consequences of these acts may have to pay a very high price indeed.

### **The Myth that Disaster Plans are Rarely Needed**

One major obstacle to making emergency management a higher priority is that disasters are seen by many CEOs as too rare to be worth the investment in time and energy.

A survey of American communities’ disaster experience between 1970 and 1985 paints a different picture of the risk:

- “The threat of a major disaster striking an American city today is greater than ever before in our history.”
- “Over half (54.9) of the jurisdictions responding (over 65% for countries) indicated that they had experienced a disaster in the past twelve years.”
- Local governments responding report over \$16 billion in property losses, 2,490 deaths, and 9.161 injuries from disasters since 1970.

This information indicates a higher degree of need for effective CEO leadership than commonly believed.

### **Possible Goals for Chief Executive Officers**

CEOs looking to reduce their risk and improve their ability to improve their emergency management leadership skills should first review their personal goals and revise them as necessary. Below are suggested a set of goals for your consideration:

- Understand the need to have a personal commitment to emergency management, to have the capability to judge its status, and develop the public policy to improve it.
- Understand how some emergencies differ from the management of normal operations and encourage the development of emergency plans and management an incident command system that all response agencies practice regularly and automatically implement when responding to all major incidents.
- Recognize the need for an Integrated Emergency Management System.
- Recognize the need for an Emergency Program Manager.
- Understand how interaction works among Federal/State/Local levels during a disaster.
- Understand the CEO's responsibilities to communicate to the community the impact of emergencies on their lives and property and how sound emergency management policy is a prudent investment in public safety.

### **Five Steps to Reducing Your Risk Using the CEO Survival Kit**

Having reviewed and decided the emergency management goals you want to set for yourself, follow this up with some concrete action steps. Consider the following steps:

- Review the kit contents
- Conduct self-assessment
- Assign staff (Emergency Program Manager or other) to prepare your survival kit (see the Sample Memo on page ?)
- Review survival kit prepared by your Emergency Program Manager
- Take others actions as necessary, such as:
  - Have similar 'survival kits' for other senior policy and program officials
  - Chair monthly Emergency Management Council to improve inter-agency working relationships for both day-to-day and disaster responses
  - Participate with all senior elected and appointed officials in a disaster exercise at least once a year
  - Review and update kit contents and checklist semi-annually

- Look over the 37 Action Steps contained in Appendix D for more ideas to strengthen your comprehensive emergency management program.

## **Section III**

### **Self-Assessment**

This is an informal five-minute quiz you can take as a confidential personal assessment of you and your community's emergency management risk. The questions reflect some of the survival capabilities that past experience has associated with effective CEO participation in emergency management.

Following the set of questions is a scoring section. The scoring section is designed to help you decide whether action is needed to reduce your risk.

1. Have you personally reviewed your community's emergency management plan within the past 12 months?    Yes    No
2. Do you have a clear understanding of your authority and responsibilities in disaster situations?    Yes    No
3. Have your elected officials participated within the last two years in either a comprehensive review of your emergency management system or a disaster exercise?    Yes    No
4. Is a single news media point of contact (e.g., public information officer) provided in your community's emergency management plan?  
Yes    No
- 5.